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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 006128

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SUBJECT: MEXICAN AND U.S. SENATORS DISCUSS MIGRATION,  
MERIDA INITIATIVE AND THE MEXICAN ECONOMY

REF: MEXICO 6049

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[¶1.](#) Summary. Mexican Senate President Santiago Creel extended a bipartisan U.S. delegation headed by Senator Harry Reid an official welcome on the floor of the Mexican Senate November 29. Afterwards, over a lunch hosted by Creel, the leaders of six of Mexico's seven political parties represented in the Senate gave short interventions addressing the central components of Mexico's relationship with the U.S. They conveyed Mexico's commitment to greater cooperation with the United States based on mutual respect drawing particular attention to the common challenge we face combating drug trafficking and the importance they attach to better treatment of Mexican migrants in the U.S. They hoped this meeting would serve the first step towards engaging in more substantive discussion of the issues that surround our important relationship as close neighbors. At the press conference concluding the encounter with the Mexican Senate, Senator Reid signaled his support for the Merida Initiative.  
End Summary.

U.S. Delegation Welcomed on Mexican Senate Floor  
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[¶2.](#) Mexican Senate President Santiago Creel extended a bipartisan U.S. delegation headed by Senator Harry Reid an official welcome on the floor of the Mexican Senate. He described the visit by seven U.S. Senators as an opportunity to improve relations and discuss greater cooperation in meeting shared challenges and responsibilities. He hoped this visit would be the first among many to come and closed quoting Abraham Lincoln who once remarked to Mexico's Ambassador, "Our two nations are friends and brothers; the border between us separates us but also unites us." Sens. Reid and Menendez commented afterwards that they had appreciated the gesture extended by the Mexican Senate.

Senators Reid and Creel Discuss Concerns in Private Meeting  
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[¶3.](#) Sens. Reid and Creel discussed bilateral concerns during a private meeting at the Senate. Senator Reid said he recognizes the resurgence of the legislative branch in Mexico and emphasized the theme of partnership and shared problems/solutions with respect to drug interdiction and immigration. While Creel highlighted the importance of the Mexican Congress in bilateral relations with the U.S., he also agreed with Senator Reid by saying that the Merida Initiative is a shared responsibility and not a grant, which

would help address a problem for both executive and legislative branches in both countries.

Guess Who's Coming to Lunch?

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14. Sens. Reid and Creel had a short private meeting followed by lunch hosted by Creel and attended by some 10 Mexican Senators and six Senators from the U.S. side. While the exchanges were respectful and balanced, they were also delivered in a formal fashion with a representative from six of Mexico's seven political parties giving a speech interspersed with remarks by each of the six U.S. Senators in attendance. They addressed the following issues:

--Migration: Several Mexican senators expressed concern about the problems Mexican migrants face in the U.S. and hoped the U.S. Congress would adopt an immigration reform bill in the near future that would better address those concerns. PRI Senate leader Manlio Fabio Beltrones conceded that Mexico needs to do a better job providing its own citizens with greater economic opportunity but also pointed out that Mexico's migrants are meeting labor demands that continue to exist in the U.S. The U.S. delegation conveyed appreciation for Mexican concerns while advising their Mexican counterparts that U.S. measures to counter illegal immigration had more to do with recovering a sense of control of U.S. borders than any animosity toward Mexico.

--Merida Initiative: The Mexican senators recognized that Mexico faced deep challenges in providing its citizens greater security. They support giving the federal government more tools to combat corruption, organized crime, narcotics trafficking and terrorism and welcome closer cooperation with the U.S. in meeting shared challenges. At the same time, they called on the U.S. to do more to combat the flow of

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weapons into Mexico and expressed concern about the trafficking of persons from Mexico into the U.S.

--Mexican economy: Senator Fernando Elizondo Barragan of the governing PAN Party drew attention to Mexico's efforts to make two monumental transitions simultaneously: from a closed, statist economy to an open market economy and from a one party, autocratic state to a participatory democracy. Mexico's Senate is beginning to function for the first time as a legitimate branch of government and was looking at reform legislation on a wide number of fronts -- pensions, justice, education, etc. that would contribute to Mexico's political and economic development. Senator Gabino Cue Monteagudo of the leftist Convergence Party complained that NAFTA had done little to improve Mexico's economy but rather had contributed to greater immigration to the U.S. He called for a review of NAFTA.

15. Senator Reid concluded the encounter by stressing the importance he attached to the U.S. developing a deeper relationship with its neighbors in Latin America - Mexico in particular. He believed both our countries could do a better job facing our coming challenges by working more closely together. He conveyed respect for President Calderon describing him as a "strong" leader whom he was confident would prove a capable advocate of Mexican interests in negotiations with the U.S.

Reid to Press: More Upbeat on Merida Initiative After Trip

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16. In speaking at a joint press conference, Senator Reid referenced his lengthy meeting with President Calderon (reftel) remarking he would make an excellent partner with the U.S. He recognized the urgency of Mexico's narco-trafficking problem and said the U.S. was obligated to help Mexico in a meaningful way. Going further, he remarked that the U.S. shared a major share of the responsibility for

Mexico's trafficking problem and needed to do a better job in terms of addressing our own demand problem. He commented that the chances of Congress approving of the Merida Initiative had improved significantly as a result of his visit to Mexico. That said, the U.S. Congress would look at the package carefully to ensure that the money goes to the right places. Human rights are important to the U.S. and the Congress will want to make sure the initiative promotes them in Mexico. He expected the U.S. Congress would move on the proposal before July 2008.

This message was cleared by CODEL Reid.

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